

**Mayor Carlos Alvarez  
State of the County 2005 Address  
Pharmed Arena  
February 18, 2005 at 10:00AM**

**OPENING**

Thank you, President Maidique for your kind introduction.

Chairman Joe Martinez.... Members of the Board of County Commissioners... Madam State Attorney Fernandez-Rundle... Clerk Ruvin.... Fellow Elected Officials... members of our Consular Corps... Mr. Manager... Fellow County Employees... Miami-Dade County Citizens... and Florida International University Students... welcome to my first State of the County address. Bienvenidos. Bon jour.

Less than two months ago, I was in this very arena and had the privilege of standing before Florida International University's graduating Class of 2004... and wishing them well in their future endeavors.

I spoke about success – how it is a journey, not a destination. The most important part of any successful journey is looking ahead.

I – like those recent graduates – am beginning a journey. My goal is to make Miami-Dade County government more responsive... respected and results-oriented.

We have a strong foundation upon which to build. Miami-Dade County functions because of the efforts of thousands of caring, committed and hardworking public servants.

The services this County provides improve the lives of our citizens in countless ways.

Before we look ahead... I want to take a look back at the year 2004 – a year filled with many accomplishments and the promise for a better tomorrow.

## **LAST YEAR'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

### **Economy**

More than 17,000 jobs were created in Miami-Dade County last year. The unemployment rate dropped to its lowest point since the year 2000.

It is our ultimate goal that every person who wants a job in Miami-Dade County has access to a job. This is not political rhetoric. The most important thing a local government can do is provide an environment that attracts employers, encourages business expansion and expands opportunity.

We are doing this. In October, an ordinance was adopted to allow wineries in Miami-Dade County. This opens up a new market that will create jobs and lure a new breed of tourists.

### **Visitors**

Our tourism industry is already thriving. Eleven million people visited Miami-Dade County last year -- the most since the year 2000. The hotel occupancy rate is up. Restaurant sales are up.

From tourists, to businesspeople, to performers and politicians, we showcased all that Miami-Dade County has to offer. We welcomed the first

Presidential debate of 2004 at the University of Miami and the MTV Video Music Awards at the American Airlines Arena.

We will welcome the International Association of Police Chiefs Convention later this year. This event alone will have an economic impact of \$16 Million dollars.

In 2007, we will host Super Bowl 41. This will be the ninth time the Super Bowl has come to Miami-Dade County. Only Miami-Dade and New Orleans hold that distinction.

Ladies and gentleman, there is no destination in the world comparable to Miami-Dade County. We must all strive to keep it that way.

### **Crime**

The brave men and women of the Miami-Dade Police Department are doing their part to keep our streets safe for visitors and residents alike.

Over the past five years, violent crime is down 12%. Non-violent crime is down 11%. These statistics are more than just numbers.

For each robbery we prevent in Miami-Dade County, that is one less person who was threatened at the point of a gun or other weapon or injured during the commission of a violent crime.

For each burglary we prevent, that is one less person who comes home after a hard day's work and finds his or her home has been broken into.

I will continue to support pro-active and aggressive programs to combat crime like the Tactical Narcotics Team, Robbery Intervention Detail, warrant sweeps

and street gang suppression. I will make sure that our police officers have the resources they need to do their jobs.

### **Homeland Security**

A critical responsibility for all our emergency personnel is continuing to strengthen homeland security at County facilities. We are readying our emergency responders for these uncertain times.

Earlier this week, Chairman Martinez, members of the County Commission and I traveled to Washington, DC where we met with our Congressional Delegation.

I am confident our Senators and Representatives understand the unique homeland security challenges Miami-Dade County faces. They are committed to assisting us with federal funding. Unlike other major cities, we have miles of coastline, consular offices, and two major ports to protect.

We all understand that no amount of security will deter the most determined terrorist, but we can continue to address areas of vulnerability to instill confidence in our residents and visitors.

### **Hurricanes**

We did this during one of Florida's most intense hurricane seasons.

Our Office of Emergency Management promptly disseminated information and assisted thousands of residents with their preparedness plans as Hurricanes Charley, Frances, Ivan and Jeanne threatened.

While Miami-Dade County did not feel the full fury of these hurricanes, we provided much-needed assistance to neighboring counties.

Members of our Fire Rescue, Building and Public Works Departments assisted victims and conducted damage assessments all across the state.

### **Elections**

The eyes of the nation were not only on us during hurricane season, but on our election process as well. Thanks to the efforts of our County staff and volunteer poll workers, the 2004 general election went smoothly.

It was costlier than expected, but more importantly, citizens were able to exercise their Constitutional right to vote – and those votes were counted.

I will be working with the County Manager to ensure that the Elections Department is budgeted at appropriate levels in the future.

Never again will we settle for anything less than the highest standards in our voting process.

Ladies and gentleman... this list of accomplishments shows that our County has so much to be proud of... but I believe we can achieve so much more.

## **THIS YEAR'S PRIORITIES**

### **Transportation/Traffic Relief**

As we look to the future, we have several challenges ahead. One of the most important remains improving our transportation system.

We must ensure that we protect the integrity of the People's Transportation Plan and deliver what we promised the voters.

As we speak, Miami-Dade transit is undergoing the largest bus fleet expansion in its history. That means more buses to more places... more often.

We are moving forward with the Metrorail extension from the Earlington Heights Station to the Miami Intermodal Center, which will connect Metrorail to the airport. And, we are aggressively seeking the federal funding needed to further expand our rail system, including a station here at F-I-U.

In addition to these long-term projects, we will further strive to ease congestion and expedite your daily commute with a combination of simple solutions and innovative ideas.

We are working on a plan that would allow public buses to use the shoulders of State Roads 836, 826 and the Turnpike to bypass traffic congestion during rush hour, when traffic is slowed to 25 miles an hour or less.

We are also working to replace the County's outdated traffic control system. As it stands now, we currently cannot detect if there is a problem at 15-hundred of the County's four-thousand traffic signals unless a motorist calls in to report it.

A state-of-the-art system is needed to detect problems, better monitor traffic patterns and coordinate signal timing.

Lastly, I have called on the County Manager to conduct a comprehensive Transit System review in order to evaluate the transportation needs of today and the future.

**GOB**

Our future also depends on how we implement the \$2.9 billion “Building Better Communities” Bond Program which voters overwhelmingly passed last year.

In big ways and small, these funds will enhance the quality of life for all residents – from new sewer connections and street signs to employment opportunities and economic growth.

There are more than 300 neighborhood and regional projects to carry out over the next 15-years. We must guarantee that the money is spent efficiently. As Mayor, I will ensure that there is transparency and accountability every step of the way.

Citizen involvement is critical to making this happen. I support a strong Citizens Advisory Committee that would monitor implementation of the program and review expenditures to ensure the most responsible use of funds.

**Permitting Process**

I will also be seeking citizen and industry input as we look for ways to streamline the permitting process. This is essential to making our government customer-friendly and efficient. In too many instances, the permitting process stymies development and causes construction delays and cost overruns.

One of my first priorities since taking office has been to fix this system.

At my request, the County Manager has outlined an action plan for making improvements to our permitting system. A key component is bringing together a corps of construction industry experts and charging them with making both short-term and long-term recommendations to improve the process. We have to cut the bureaucratic red tape that hinders productivity and our own economic prosperity.

### **Environment**

Responsible development must be pursued while ensuring proper environmental safeguards are in place. Recently, there has been mounting pressure to expand the Urban Development Boundary, and open the door to new development. We must be extremely cautious when making land use decisions that could have an adverse impact on our environment.

The South Miami-Dade Watershed Study is at a critical stage. Later this year, we will have final recommendations outlining the best way to balance growth with environmental concerns.

This watershed area plays a vital role in the health of Biscayne Bay and the Everglades. The longer I live in South Florida, the more I come to appreciate these natural wonders.

Until the Watershed Study is complete, I am committed to keeping the U-D-B right where it is – not moving it – unless absolutely necessary. We must carefully manage the expansion of our community and maximize options to increase development within the U-D-B.



We cannot stop population growth over the next 20 years, but we can take measured steps to provide a healthy environment and economy for all.

### **Elderly**

That includes our senior citizens. This is a generation I believe has been overlooked.

While the debate over the solvency of Social Security escalates, I have a more fundamental concern – the health and wellbeing of Miami-Dade's elderly population.

That is why I am launching an Elder Wellness Initiative. Over the next two years, with the help of public-private partnerships, we will be holding a series of activities geared specifically to our County's seniors.

Our goal is to foster healthy lifestyles among the elderly and reduce the risk of disease. In turn, we can provide relief to our overburdened health care system.

Being aged in Miami-Dade County should not be a burden that carries stress and undue hardship. We have a moral obligation to care for those who cared for us.

I believe the citizens of this great County would agree that we should ensure our seniors live in an atmosphere of dignity and respect.

### **Education**

As we care for our seniors, we must also cradle our youth. I believe in having good schools where our students grow, learn, and prepare for the day when they will become productive members of society and leaders in our community.

A couple of weeks ago, I met with Miami-Dade School Superintendent Rudy Crew who outlined an ambitious plan to make our students more competitive with those across the country, and create a more viable workforce here at home.

A major focus of Dr. Crew's plan is on middle school reforms – integrating algebra, foreign languages, ethics, economics and career counseling into the curriculum. We are turning out too many students who cannot balance a checkbook and do not realize the significance of community service. We must do more to lead these students to college and careers.

As the former Director of the Miami-Dade Police Department, I learned there is one common denominator among children in trouble with the law – they cannot read or write. We need to ensure children remain in school, not only for the betterment of their futures, but for the betterment of our community.

Discussions are underway with juvenile justice experts to institute truancy court proceedings and even bring those proceedings directly into the schools.

During the next two years, I also plan to aggressively fight juvenile delinquency through prevention and intervention with youthful offenders and their families. I support efforts of the Miami-Dade Criminal Justice Council, the Miami-

Dade County Youth Crime Task Force and the County's Juvenile Assessment Center to reduce and eliminate juvenile crime.

We must seek to enhance and expand existing programs targeting juvenile gangs and tap into available federal and state funds dedicated to the eradication of gang violence.

### **Mental Health**

While early intervention is the key to helping our children, reversing years of neglect is the key to helping our mentally ill.

I have spent much of my adult life putting criminals in jail. Jails are no place for our mentally ill.

A recently-released Miami-Dade grand jury report listed dozens of recommendations to improve the lives of our mentally ill. I do not intend to let those recommendations sit idle.

Something needs to change. We cannot continue to warehouse the sick in our jails. We must find ways to treat them before it is too late.

In the coming weeks, I will form a task force made up of criminal justice experts, mental-health advocates and others to study the best ways to implement at least some of the grand jury's recommendations. I believe our state legislators will work with us in this regard.

### **Healthcare**

In order to meet the healthcare needs of our residents, especially the most vulnerable, we must continue to work to improve our public health system. We are moving forward with a plan to bring financial stability to Jackson Health System. This will be challenging, but we cannot afford to fail.

I have discussed with Jackson Health System President Marvin O'Quinn, ways to root out ineffective business practices, outdated systems and staff inefficiencies.

By the end of the year, new financial systems will be implemented. We are restructuring and reorganizing.

We are establishing cost controls to reverse Jackson's downward financial trend, while still providing quality medical care to those in need.

### **Airport**

My office is not only focused on the lives of people, but also on their livelihoods. That includes the more than 230-thousand people who work – either directly or indirectly – for our County's premier economic engine – Miami International Airport.

We are focused on keeping and increasing the number of passengers who use M-I-A.

Two weeks ago, I had the chance to tour the airport and what I saw was a tale of two terminals.

An expanded South Terminal is slated to open next year. The project will provide nearly one million square feet of additional space. It is a beautiful expanse of glass and steel. The ongoing progress is evident.

The North Terminal has the potential to be just as grand, but is currently mired in delays and cost overruns. We must face the challenges head-on and move forward. Our County's viability depends on it.

In addition, I am troubled by the criticism of many people, not only international travelers or those from other U.S. cities, but our own residents who are critical of our ability to provide quality service to air travelers.

As you all know, we are currently conducting an international search to identify the most progressive and experienced airport professional. I want to assure you this will be an open process based on merit and fitness for the position.

Whether it is a matter of hospitality, efficiency or infrastructure, we have an obligation to do everything possible to make M-I-A not only a destination of necessity, but a port of preference.

### **Seaport**

Our seaport is making steady progress in transporting people and cargo.

The port recently welcomed two new passenger ships, The Carnival Valor and the Norwegian Spirit.

It regularly sees goods from Central and South America, Asia and the Far East.

Dredging that will allow mega-cruise ships to dock is scheduled to take place later this year.

Cruise ship passengers are safer because of a newly designed roadway system that separates cruise and cargo traffic.

My foremost priority at the Port is security. I want to make sure that resources are allocated so security concerns are addressed.

### **FTAA**

The international travel and trade already taking place at our ports puts us in a strong position to become the permanent Secretariat of the Free Trade Area of the Americas and secure the global position in commerce that is our destiny.

Our demographic diversity, unique location, and existing global business environment have already made us the undeniable Gateway to the Americas.

Because of existing trade partnerships, we are number one in the U.S. in transporting international freight, second in international passengers, and home to more than one-hundred financial institutions, making Miami-Dade County one of the top international banking centers in the United States.

Trade among the 34 FTAA countries amounts to more than \$750 billion dollars a year.

Economists project that locating the permanent Secretariat in South Florida would boost U.S. exports by nearly \$25 billion dollars a year. That means new direct investments and jobs. More importantly, it means an expanded reputation as a leader in international business.

**Performing Arts Center**

An international flavor will be the hallmark of the Greater Miami Performing Arts Center which is scheduled to open in the fall of 2006. It will house some of the finest and most diverse music, dance, opera and theater in the world. It is a testament to South Florida's commitment to arts and culture.

As one of my first acts as Mayor, I toured the facility. I am pleased with the recent progress. The restructuring plan put in place in July has improved morale and increased productivity.

Driving past the facility, you can actually see the Center taking shape. The frames of the ballet opera house and concert hall are up. The pedestrian bridge over Biscayne Boulevard is in place. The Sears Tower exterior restoration is nearly complete.

The County's support of this facility has spurred residential, commercial and retail investment along Biscayne Boulevard and in surrounding areas.

We are destined to be a world-class venue for the performing arts, something our children and grandchildren can forever look on with satisfaction and pride – something all of us can be proud of.

**Marlins Stadium**

Together with the arts, museums and cultural facilities, professional sports are an important part of our community fabric.

We should work to ensure that the Florida Marlins remain in Miami-Dade County for many years to come.

That is why I am supportive of the memorandum of understanding negotiated by the County Manager, the City of Miami and the team.

I look forward to working with the County Commission and the Legislature to finalize the financing plan and make a state-of-the-art ballpark in Miami a reality.

### **Reform**

Finally, as voters know, I ran on a platform of reform. I believe we must do a number of things to restructure our government and bring about fundamental change.

I will be concentrating on the areas of procurement reform and specific authority for the Office of the Mayor.

On these issues, some Miami-Dade Commissioners and I have an ideological disagreement between conscientious and well-meaning elected officials.

In the coming weeks, I will be submitting my recommendations on these reforms to the Commission.

Let me emphasize, this is not about people or personalities. This is not about the honesty or integrity of those now involved in the process.

This is about placing responsibility where there is accountability.



**Commission Salaries**

As I push for fundamental reforms, I am also supporting a salary increase for our Commissioners.

Our County Commission is deserving of compensation comparable to the amount of work they do.

An increase in salary – consistent with the state formula – would allow them to function as a full-time body. Broward and Palm Beach Counties already use this method.

I believe an increase in salary would also encourage other members of our community to seek public office.

We ask a lot of our Commissioners, while paying them only \$6,000 a year. I will work with the County Commission to ensure their compensation is consistent with their responsibilities.

More importantly, I want to assure our citizens that the changes I am proposing will not interfere with our day-to-day operations.

**CLOSING**

As my first 100-days in office come to a close, I want to say that I am proud of the progress we are making. I am committed to bringing about real change in order to help our County reach its full potential. I look forward to the challenges ahead.

Much has been said about my vision for this great community. I want to assure one and all that while, by nature, I am cautious, I am committed to

progress – maybe not the kind of advancement some deem revolutionary, but progress – with due diligence and extreme caution, nonetheless.

I do have vision. I see a Miami-Dade County that is a better place – a place where all of us are proud to say this is our home.

God bless you and God bless Miami-Dade County.